

# Easement protects family ranch east of Bella Vista

*Son says effort pays tribute to mother, father*

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The more than 5,000 acres that make up the Rickert Brothers Ranch east of Bella Vista will be spared from development under a recent conservation easement acquired by Redding-based Shasta Land Trust.

That means a lot to 92-year-old Jim Rickert, whose father and mother, George and Florence Rickert, bought the spread in late 1950.

"It's sort of a tribute to our mother and father," said Rickert, a longtime Shasta County resident who moved to Sacramento six years ago. "We all worked together."

He and his brothers, Duke and Bud, both deceased, owned the Rickert Meat Co.

Rickert and his wife, Eva, and his sisters-in-law, Ruth and Elizabeth Rickert of Cottonwood, retain ownership of the ranch. Jim Rickert's son and daughter-in-law, Jim and Mary Rickert, lease the grazing rights for their cattle business.

The owners may sell the land or pass it down, but the restrictions imposed by the easement remain.

"Effectively it will be an agricultural property forever," Ben Miles, the nonprofit trust's executive director, said Wednesday. With its vernal pools, 8 miles of creeks and blue-oak woodlands, the ranch fits well with the trust's aim to protect resources such as open space, wildlife habitat and clean water.

Partnering with The Trust for Public Land, the Shasta trust's acquisition brings to 20,000 the number of acres the group has brought under its wing since it was founded 13 years ago.

"I think it's very significant," Miles said. "I think the organization and the people who support the Shasta Land Trust have a lot to be proud of. Twenty-thousand acres for a small, local organization like ours is quite a milestone."

Funding for the \$2.3 million ranch project includes \$1 million from the Safe Drinking Water Bond Act of 2006, or Proposition 84, awarded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Other money came from U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and state Department of Transportation programs.

"This conservation easement will protect valuable natural resources," said Jim Branham, executive officer for the conservancy. The Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit, provided management, legal services and partial funding for the project.

Although no public access to its easements exists, the Shasta trust periodically hosts events, in cooperation with landowners, to showcase the property and its ecological attributes.

Randy Rickert, 59, cattleman Jim Rickert's brother, has spent much of his life on the ranch.

"The family was there all the time working on it," he said. He fondly remembers swimming in the streams and hunting deer.

He's happy development will be prohibited.

"It is a scenic, very pretty, very unique piece of property," he said. "There's going to be a lot of pressure to develop on down the road, 20, 30, 40 years from now. This stops that."

His father agreed.

"We always loved the ranch," his father said. "We thought it would be good to pass it on down the generations. This way it will always be open space."